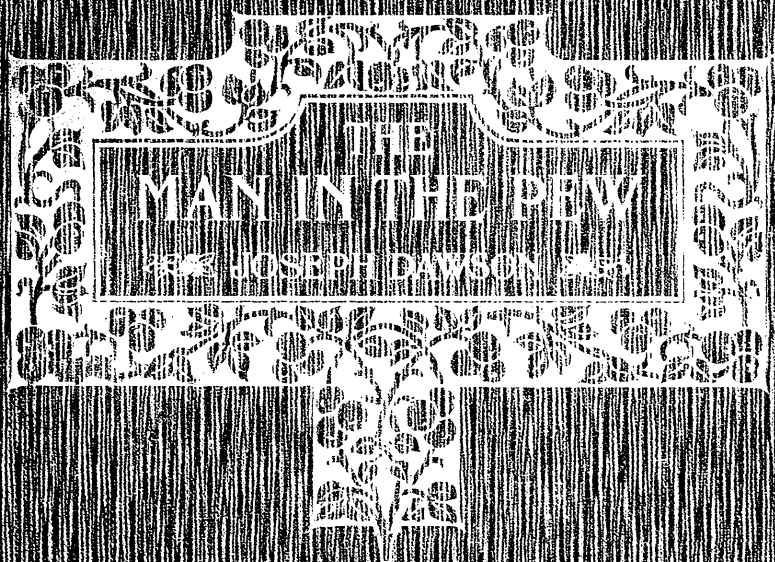




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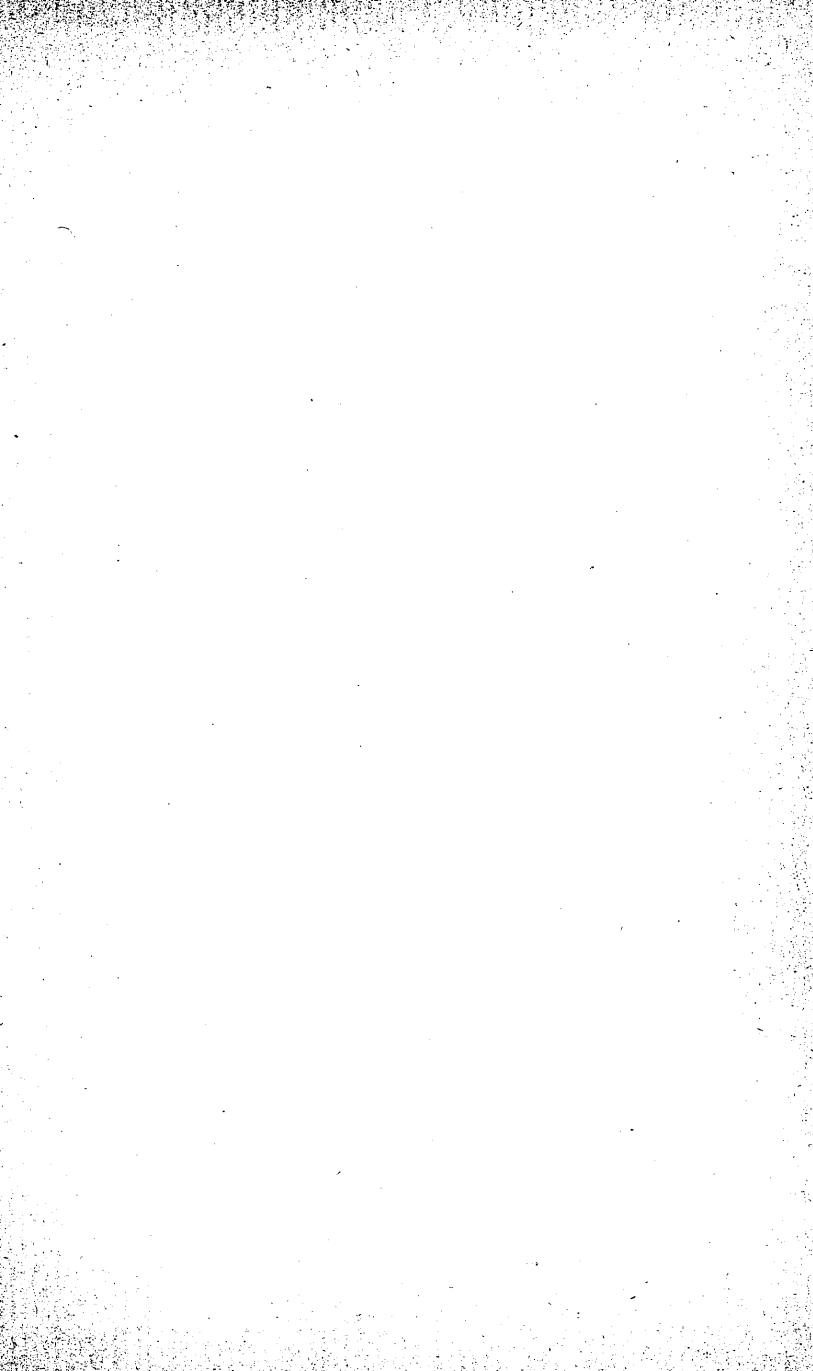
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THE MAN IN THE PEW

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THE
MAN IN THE PEW
OR

HOW TO HEAR THE SERMON

BY

JOSEPH DAWSON

AUTHOR OF

'PETER MACKENZIE : HIS LIFE AND LABOURS,' 'PICTURES
OF CHRIST FRAMED IN PRAYERS,' ETC.

LONDON

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1904

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This cuff was but to knock at your ear, and beseech
listening.

SHAKESPEARE.

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PREFACE

THE aim of this book is to bring the man in the pew into more definite relation with the man in the pulpit. With some the hearing of sermons is a profit and delight, with others it is either neglected entirely or endured in a listless, haphazard, unjoyful manner: numbers decline to listen at all, while many who have ears are as those who have none. Even where there are great preachers and great crowds, for want of guidance much of the hearing runs to waste. The writer believes the remedy is not to be found in mere disparagement the one of the other, but in bringing pulpit and pew closer together; especially in enabling the hearer to make his share of the task less desultory, more concentrated and direct. Suggestions are offered him in these pages

which, if duly pondered, must help to educate him in the art of listening.

That all the conclusions of the writer will be accepted is more than he dares to anticipate. His mind has been spoken freely ; and while it is not impossible he may have impinged on the prejudices of a few, he trusts he has wounded the spirit of none.

ASHTEAD,
July, 1904.

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HEARING AS AN ART

. *Nature*, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man—space, the air, the river, the leaf. *Art* is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things—as in a house, a canal, a statue, a picture.

EMERSON.

HEARING AS AN ART

THE preacher is plentifully provided with manuals. There is hardly a phase of his bearing, from the height of his collar to the depth of his convictions, that has not been expounded. Books have been thrown at him as confetti are thrown at brides ; and were his profiting to be measured by the amplitude of his admonitions, he would be of all men most perfect.

With the hearer it is not so. For him but scanty provision has been made. He is the Samaritan left with the wounds of his ignorance unstanched while the priest and the Levite of instruction pass by on the other side. Certainly the pulpit has not forgotten him. Never a Sabbath passes but the man in the pew is slogged by the man in the pulpit. They will be the best of friends at the dinner table

afterwards, but for ten minutes or half an hour the hearer submits to be trampled upon and laid waste. Yet, despite these hortatory attacks, he is to be reckoned among the neglected classes. No one has taken him in hand methodically, scientifically, as reformers have taken up the street arab or the defects in the Army. Our library shelves are weighted with treatises on the art of preaching, but who can show us a volume on the art of hearing? Into such a quagmire of indifference has it sunk that many will smile incredulously at the very phrase.

Art of hearing! Unhappy words! Art enters not into so simple a matter. We hear by nature if we hear at all, and many of us would feel better at the end of a sermon if aural appendages had never been developed.

Such is the common opinion, and there is much to be said for it; and yet it is not in harmony with fact. Hearing is an art, and until it comes to be regarded as such, more than half the time spent in listening will be wasted. 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear' is not only a proverbial injunction, but

a scientific admonition; and as long as we neglect so to conceive of it our minds will remain as they are now, lumber-chambers, stored with the useless and often dangerous fragments of unassorted, unrelated truths.

Few will object when we speak of preaching as an art. The preacher is assumed to have submitted himself to a certain amount of training, and both in matter and style is supposed to have regard to specific rules. However reckless and unfettered a child of nature he may be, there are homiletical, rhetorical, and logical requirements to which he must accord a meed of respect. He may be a free lance, an Esau, a pulpit Bohemian; but amid the wildest licence, the most profligate unconventionality, attention to method and order cannot be entirely laid aside. Nearly all preaching indeed is artful (using the word in a worthy sense); and the better preaching it is, the more artful it will be. The art may be hidden, but its absence is not to be inferred from its concealment. To the art of preaching there may be added the art of hiding the art by which we preach.

A sermon is supposed to consist of an *introduction*, a *proposition*, a *proof*, and an *application*. All sermons do not conform to this type. Sometimes the introduction is omitted, and the subject plunged into headlong, or the proof is shirked and the application forgotten. Sometimes the sermon has many heads and no body, or is all body and no heads ; but, whatever its nature, some amount of art must be involved in its composition. Where arrangement is wholly lacking, the preacher will be beyond hearing ; the sermon will not hold together, neither will the congregation.

You shall hear a preacher who has many divisions, and who states them formally ; you shall hear another who employs none of these landmarks of thought, or such as are only visible to his own mind, and to which he gives no outward expression. The technique of the one is obvious, that of the other undiscerned ; but each will have his art, and probably he who is the greater preacher will have the most while he shows the least.

To meet and interpret this art in the pulpit

there must be a corresponding art in the pew, and the lack of it is one chief cause of that predicated failure of preaching concerning which the secular and religious press indulges in periodical banter or lamentation, pleasantries or jeremiads. Generally the preacher is made to bear the brunt of the blame. He is informed oracularly that he is hopelessly behind the times, that the pulpit is a defunct institution, that sermons are not now in vogue any more than stage coaches, that in the vast onward sweep of the world he must make way for something larger and more impressive.

There is a certain amount of truth in such criticisms. Many preachers are impossible, many sermons are a weariness to the flesh, stodgy, commonplace, depressing, intolerable. But what of the hearer? Is he an innocent martyr, always to be pitied, never to be blamed?

On the contrary, the man in the pew is responsible for much that is heaped upon the shoulders of the man in the pulpit: his sins are as heinous, his faults as provoking. His indifference, his dullness, his indolence, his

superb ineptitude lie at the root of many of the evils which his advocates condemn. Good listening goes far towards producing good preaching; and when the pew comes to realise that the obligation to listen intelligently and appreciatively is as binding as the obligation to preach intelligently and effectually, that art in the ear is to keep pace with art in the tongue, then will the sermon become a mightier weapon and the preacher a greater power.

THE POINTS TO BE NOTED IN
A SERMON

Above all things, order and distribution, and singling out of parts, is the life of dispatch, so as the distribution be not too subtle; for he that doth not divide will never enter well into business, and he that divideth too much will never come out of it clearly.

BACON'S *Essays*.

THE POINTS TO BE NOTED IN A SERMON

IT has been calculated that one hundred thousand sermons are preached in the British Isles every Sunday. If an average of twenty persons be allowed to every preacher as a congregation, we have a total of one million listeners. Be the figures less or more, the number is immense, and yet out of this huge aggregate how few would be able on the Monday morning to repeat to an examiner a tolerable outline of what they had heard on the previous Sabbath!

It is to be admitted in extenuation that many sermons are neither fit to be carried away nor consumed on the premises. There is nothing in them nor about them of which the most ardent listener can lay hold; like a jelly-fish they slip inevitably from the fingers.

They are earnest, maybe, pious, and of godly intention, but as innocent of brains or spiritual force as a babe is of experience. Out of one hundred thousand, however, there must be many which it would be profitable to retain, if the mind could be educated to make the most of them. How is it to be done? How is the art of listening to be cultivated?

The first thing for the hearer to get fixed in his mind is that the sermon is a structure built on definite lines for definite ends, and that only to him who endeavours to master the secret of its construction will it yield the full wealth of its contents. It is a house with doors and windows, staircases and passages, and it is only as you discover where these are placed, and make wise and generous use of them, that the building will offer to you the shelter and accommodation it is capable of affording. Sit lazily outside of it, stare at it in stupid indifference, make no effort to find its inlets and exits, its aspect and outlook, and it will be to you a thing of blank walls, oppressive in their monotony and shadow. Many sermons are a blank because the minds of the

listeners are a blank ; there is no brightness in the one because there is such pitiful dullness in the other.

If the preacher is to interest your mind and refresh your heart, there must be an honest endeavour on your part to understand him. You must be more than an empty pitcher waiting to be filled ; your own hand must dip into the well, and the water will be shallow indeed if it dip in vain.

Begin your practice of the art of hearing by taking interest in the *text*. Listen briskly to its announcement ; if possible, fix its location and phraseology in the memory. Think of it as the pivot on which the sermon will hang, or the fountain from which it will flow, or the dark chamber into which it will carry light. It will stimulate your attention to ask mentally what is its character and what the preacher is likely to make of it. Is it long or short, bright or dark, common or unusual ? Is it doctrinal or ethical or evangelical or mystical, a theological statement, a moral precept, a trumpet-call to action, or a theme for quiet meditation ? Is it a motto, labelling or

suggesting a subject, or is it the subject itself? Could the sermon easily dispense with it, or is it as much a part of it as the root is of the tree? Is the subject so remote that any other text would serve as well, or does the preacher educe from it principles which it alone can yield?

Lingering thus with inquiring mind around the text will prove a fruitful exercise. It will beget alertness at the very beginning, and form a starting-point from which the hearer may be led on to more profitable investigations and more spiritual results.

After the text follows the *introduction*, the nature of which may prove most suggestive to a careful listener. What is there more interesting in architecture than the study of porches: the round-headed, deeply recessed Norman, the pointed or trefoiled of the Early English, the elaborately buttressed and pinnacled of the Perpendicular? And on a smaller scale a like interest may be found in the study of the porch through which the preacher conducts his hearers into the temple of the discourse. The observant listener, after

a short experience, will be amazed to find what an aid the introduction becomes to enabling him to diagnose the mental and spiritual quality of the preacher; for in nothing does the calibre of the man in the pulpit manifest itself more strikingly than in the effective or incapable manner in which he lays hold of his congregation at the commencement of his discourse. Sermons, like books, betray their dullness or brilliancy in the opening sentences, and as a skilful reader will know before he finishes the first page whether it will repay him to travel further, so will a skilful listener know before he has heard a dozen sentences whether he is about to be bored or edified.

After the introduction will come the *divisions*; where such are formally announced, and even where they are not, there will be something to indicate the plan on which the sermon is constructed and the links that bind it together. It is of decided importance to grasp these links. The tendency in modern sermons is to conceal them. Whatever may be said of churches, preachers have fewer divisions than in the days when Richard

Baxter announced no less than one hundred and twenty heads within the compass of one discourse. One is tempted to say that the saints would need that *Everlasting Rest* about which he wrote so elaborately if with every sermon he gave them so heavy a basket to bear away.

The burdens of the hearer are much lighter to-day. It can be no great tax on his powers to master the two or three heads under which the teaching of the sermon is usually arranged, or, where these are lacking, to gain an insight into its central truth or principle. Special heed should be paid to such phrases as 'firstly,' 'secondly,' 'thirdly,' 'in the next place,' 'I digress,' 'to resume,' and others of a similar sort that indicate in what direction the preacher is proceeding and whither he desires the hearer to follow.

Children and young people should be instructed to note the things to which reference has been made. Such attention would frequently lighten up the whole service for them, and leave them richer at the close. On the part of both children and adults there

must be a renouncement of sloth and indifference and the cultivation of a greater mental alertness. Let parents foster in their children respect for the sermon instead of encouraging the too common disposition to speak of it slightingly, to make it the butt of the satirist, the target at which every unfledged witling shoots arrows too dull to pierce, but that leave after each twang of the bow a deeper lack of reverence in the archer's soul.

ON HEARING SYMPATHETICALLY

There is no teaching until the pupil is brought into the same state or principle in which you are; he is you, and you are he; then is a teaching; and by no unfriendly chance or bad company can he ever quite lose the benefit.

EMERSON.

ON HEARING SYMPATHETICALLY

I HAVE noted uncounted times how two persons will listen to the same sermon with the most divergent results, the one receiving edification, the other remaining indifferent or dissatisfied. The difference is not one of capacity, but of mood. In the one case there is sympathy between the hearer and the preacher, in the other case sympathy is lacking. To get the best out of any preacher, good or bad, our attitude must be sympathetic. If we turn towards him a nature hard as the soil trodden by a thousand feet, what wonder if neither his rain nor sunshine takes effect?

It may fairly be taken for granted that the aim of every preacher is to do his hearers good, to comfort, to enlighten, to warn, to stimulate, to inspire, to strengthen. You will

surely credit even the poorest with such a desire ; but he can only be successful so far as you co-operate with him. You must meet him at least half-way. You must be prepared to return him interest and thought and feeling for the interest and thought and feeling he bestows on you.

This desire on the part of the preacher may seem a trite consideration to urge, but it will give responsiveness to your attitude to bear it in mind, to remember as you listen that the preacher is seeking to benefit and bless you. His powers may be limited, his manner feeble, his matter unattractive ; there may be much in his performance that you cannot admire, yet still he is your friend, and courtesy demands that you should be friendly. Give him a chance. Do not turn your back on him. Do not shake your fist in his face. Do not compel him to cross a morass of indifference or to break through wire entanglements of antagonism to get at you. His task, poor fellow, is difficult in the very nature of things : do not increase it. Preaching is a joint concern, and it is only as preacher and hearer

combine that success can be pulled off. Take your fair share of the work, and, offering him responsive strings, you will be surprised at the wealth of sound which even an indifferent player can evoke from the instrument.

To reflect on the difficulties with which preaching is beset will contribute materially to this result. No man can stand in a pulpit and talk effectually to his fellows without previous labour. In many cases there has been much sweat of brain and travail of soul, and bare justice demands that these shall be rewarded with a sympathetic response on the part of the hearer. When the glibness and cocksureness of the speaker indicate plainly that he is bringing to his congregation what has cost him nothing, no such return is desirable. Such intruders on a sacred office merit contempt and scornful rejection ; but wherever there has been conscientious preparation, it should be repaid with patient attention.

It is well also to remember that the toil of preaching is not confined to the preparation. There is wrestling and strain of heart in the pulpit as well as in the study, and the pressure

of this is enhanced or diminished by the attitude of the congregation. Only those who have stood there can understand what disconcertment and often acute distress a yawn, or a vacant stare, or a supercilious smile, or a stolid demeanour will bring to the man in the pulpit; or on the other hand how a look of approval, a gleam of appreciation, a nod of assent will arouse in him fresh ardour of conception and utterance.

There are stages in the sermon when this responsive attitude on the part of the congregation is peculiarly helpful and the lack of it correspondingly unfortunate. Every sermon worth preaching has its point of difficulty, a spot in the mountain climb where a crevasse has to be crossed or an ice slope mastered. The reasoning perhaps becomes closer and more entangled, or the exposition slightly subtle, and a greater strain is laid upon the faculties of the congregation. The preacher at such a stage grows increasingly concerned, and should he notice inattention or lack of appreciation in his audience, will probably flounder somewhat, or perhaps go back on

his subject, and, in the endeavour to make clear what the bearing of his hearers has led him to deem obscure, will worry and exhaust himself to an extent that a little more sympathy on their part might have entirely prevented.

In some churches the space between the pulpit and the pew is large. Words have to be lifted over a desert of floor before they can fall on the front line of the congregation. This is a disadvantage to the preacher. His words have not only farther to travel, but the distance in itself chills and paralyses him. And even where no such architectural drawback exists, where the congregation is properly and agreeably distanced, neither too near nor too far, there is yet a distance of thought and feeling to be covered. The mental and spiritual condition of the people seldom tallies exactly with that of the preacher. He by his preparation has been made to occupy a higher level. He has thought and felt himself upward, and his work is to lift his congregation to the same altitude.

Picture the assembly that confronts him on a Sabbath morning! That man, freed for a

few hours from the grasp of the material ; that woman, cumbered with household cares or fretted with worldly vanities ; that youth, with no thought save for the football match that came off yesterday, or is not to be played until next Saturday ; that girl, wrapt in the dream of a new novel or a new bonnet or a new love ;—these, and a hundred others in conditions of need as diversified as the plants of the field, have by his endeavours to be interested, elevated, purified ! What a burden is laid upon the man ! Not merely to fill with talk a certain interval of time, for preaching is infinitely more than the utterance of ordered words. It is an intellectual and spiritual dynamic, a force intended to make of men what they could not otherwise become—wiser, nobler, more akin to God. The preacher must reach them ; he must fling out cords of thought and emotion, argument and passion, by which he can draw them up to where he stands himself. Seen in this light, it becomes evident that his work is one that demands their response, their sympathy, their co-operation. They may hold themselves

stubbornly aloof in icy reserve, or may submit in part, or, like the waters lifted by the sun, may yield without restraint all they have and are to his magnetic impulsion.

Herein, then, lies the value of sympathetic hearing. By the exercise of it we may halve the labour and double the success of him who speaks to us for God; through the lack of it we may dig a chasm between ourselves and the pulpit which even the ablest preacher will labour in vain to bridge.

CONTINUITY IN HEARING

Swiftly do these winged thoughts come, when we pray, or read, or listen ; in our inattentive, sauntering, wayside hours, and before we can be upon our guard, the very trace of holier purposes has disappeared.

F. W. ROBERTSON.

CONTINUITY IN HEARING

AN Irishman alighted at a railway station for refreshment, but unfortunately the bell rang and the train started again before he had finished his drink. Running along the platform after the train, he shouted, 'Hould on, there! hould on! You've got a passenger aboard that's left behind.' Pat's imaginary predicament is not a bad representation of the hearer who thinks himself aboard the sermon, when in reality it has travelled far ahead of him; and such hearers are numerous.

What a revelation the preacher would receive if on a Sunday morning the tops of his hearers' skulls were to lift like lids, and, looking down into their brains, he could discern at a given moment what the thoughts of each one were! Probably the most popular orator would find more than half his congregation

defaulters, present in body but absent in mind ; and that instead of talking to a thousand he was heard by only about four hundred and twenty-five. It is supposed by some that in our dreams the mind leaves the body quietly in bed, and takes excursions on its own account. Whatever be the fact in regard to dreams, it is tolerably certain that under the sermon such evacuation of the fleshly tenement is frequent : the body remains in the pew, but the mind travels to the ends of the earth.

In certain circumstances this capability of abstraction, this power to go outside without taking one's hat or waiting for the benediction, is a merciful provision. Hereby escape we great mental discomfort. Happy the chance by which, when the preacher is beating the air without even waking a draught, we can flee to more congenial climes, and no one be disturbed by either our going or return. Under prosy sermons, wandering thoughts are the wings of the dove for which the psalmist yearned ; on them we can fly away and be at rest.

But, while admitting this, the obligation to

hear continuously, instead of in streaks and spasms, remains valid ; for while a poor sermon may be made tolerable by receiving it in scraps, a good one may be ruined. And the mischief is that he who listens disjointedly knows not whether it is good or bad. He is like a man journeying in a closed carriage through a strange country, who now looks at the landscape and now turns away his eyes, and at the end of his route knows not through what manner of scenery he has passed. Perhaps it might be granted as a general rule that if the former half of the sermon is only an infliction long drawn out, the hearer may be granted indulgence to evade the rest, and yet both hearers and preachers would improve if concentration could be made the rule.

Until we have learned to listen continuously the art of hearing is not mastered. Duty to our own minds demands the effort. To allow the mind to wander is to weaken its capacity, to give it an evil training, making of it a spoiled child that follows its own whims and caprices, impatient of parental control. Let no man so indulge his offspring. He who

permits his mind to carry him hither and thither at its pleasure has relinquished self-government, and become the slave of his own unregulated fancies.

Against nothing must the hearer struggle more resolutely than this peril of distraction. You will find temptations to it in your *surroundings*. The cough of the man sitting behind may lead you to speculate whether he has had bronchitis or is about to give it a trial; the bonnet of the lady in front may carry you to an establishment in Regent Street or Paris, where you once saw a similar adornment, the non-purchase of which you have regretted ever since; a fly on the wall may set you wondering what such insects live on in church, whether they are there from choice or compulsion, whether the singing delights or annoys them, what becomes of them between Sundays, or whether they will ever progress so far as to form worshipping communities of their own. These are but scanty illustrations of a thousand distractions which may beset you, for thought is like a match, which on any of the things around may be struck into flame.

In the *sermon*, too, you will find these temptations to go off at a tangent ; and they must be resisted with all your might. When the preacher happens to mention Rome, do not spend the next five minutes in enumerating all the places of interest your cousin, who is there for a holiday, is likely to visit ; when reference is made to Bunyan, do not let your mind become imprisoned in Bedford goal, or thrust into Doubting Castle by Giant Despair, or borne with Faithful through all the distractions of Vanity Fair. There is an imaginative filling out of the sermon which is not only lawful but desirable. The best sort of listener is he whose mind is so richly furnished that the preacher's words partake of its colour and illumination, and, instead of falling dead, are quickened at once into a radiant vitality. But in such a mind the enrichment must not proceed too far. Let it put its light and strength into the preacher's utterances, but not allow itself to be borne by them into lands of its own creation.

Some of the strongest provocations to distraction are to be found, not in the sermon

or the surroundings, but in *ourselves*. We may not only discover a fly on the wall of the sanctuary, but there may be flies in the mind, whose buzzing will fill our ears through the whole service. Small worries, especially of a financial nature, can put the wasp or the humble bee to shame in this work. They can bite like mosquitoes, and make frets in the skin on which the noblest words will fall in vain. But neither wasps nor mosquitoes are omnipotent. They may be strong, but we ought to be stronger. The net of a firm resolution may keep them at a distance and render them harmless. No man should strive so resolutely against distractions as the worried man, for no one requires more the solace which the sermon may convey. As, in Wesley's words, we should never pray so earnestly as when we are tempted not to pray at all, so never should we make such strong endeavour to fix the mind on higher things as when our worries are buzzing within us like a swarm of angry bees.

Whatever cares or distractions beset you when you start for the house of God, put

them aside when you reach the place. Leave your business and your pleasure outside. Do not set up the tables of the money-changers or the tents of worldly enjoyment in the sanctuary. Do not sit like a saint in your pew while all the time your mind is at your office in the city casting up accounts, or working out the probabilities of a new speculation or a recent investment. This is hypocrisy, and you are too good a fellow to be a hypocrite. Say with the poet,

My mind to me a kingdom is ;

and so far as your presence in the sanctuary is concerned, determine to be ruler in the kingdom, to let no aliens intrude, and to maintain your lands in order and well-being. He is a feeble king who cannot maintain quietude in his realm, and he is certainly not a strong man who cannot mentally hold his foes afar and ensure peace at home.

ON HEARING FOR ONESELF

Go to your bosom ;
Knock there ; and ask your bosom what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault.

Measure for Measure.

ON HEARING FOR ONESELF

NEVER is the human heart in so generous a mood as under the strokes of a scathing sermon. It bestows then with a lavish hand. Nothing is too precious to be parted with: rich advice, precious warnings, golden admonitions, ripe instruction, all are liberally handed on to others. In such moments altruism is triumphant; selfishness is trampled under foot. No man thinks of himself; every one thinks of another. Could this luxuriant bountifulness be made to survive the service and carried into the kingdom of every-day life, the wilderness would be glad for it and the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose.

How exquisite too the tact and discrimination born of such an occasion! It is no scrambling, unheeding charity that then goes forth. It is benevolence, subtle-sighted,

ingenuous, impartial ; swift to discern where the wound is sorest, where the healing will be best bestowed. Men and women at such a time seem to be gifted with supernatural insight, a faculty of assortment, a power to diagnose the diseases of others that is positively amazing. Under its inspiration the most ordinary-minded woman can divine in a moment what in the sermon is fitted to her neighbour and assign it to her needs in the most charmingly beneficent manner ; and a man of the dullest intellect will prescribe portions for others with a certainty and promptitude which, were he a physician, would win for him a fortune. If such magnanimity and discrimination could be perpetuated, the millennium would dawn upon us unawares !

Can not some moralist unfold to us the secret of this expansiveness and self-abnegation ? What is it that makes us so ready to hear for others, to give to them ungrudgingly what probably we stand in sore need of ourselves ? Is it an outcome of the feeling, of which we are all conscious, that enables us to assure ourselves that the misfortunes which

fall so heavily on our neighbours—suffering, calamity, death—will somehow pass us by; that there may be collisions on the railway, but not when we are in the train; shipwrecks, but not when we are at sea; sudden deaths, but always outside our family circle? Or is it that we know others so much better than we know ourselves; can see their faults whilst blind to our own, even though they are of the same colour? Perhaps it is that we see the disease is ours, but are not willing to make a personal application of the remedy; so, as the lash falls, we turn the stripes on to other shoulders and let our own go free. The whip will smite the guilty, and though we do not consciously reckon ourselves among them, yet in some inexplicable fashion the strokes will do us good. Though we may not quite understand the process, a feeling of satisfaction is begotten in watching our own sins punished in the person of another. It is like knowing we ought to be hanged, and rejoicing that our crimes are expiated, because the gallows, though it misses us, finds so many other victims.

If some such sentiment be not common, it is difficult to understand why what is called 'plain preaching' should be so greatly relished. The sermon that smites men's sins straight in the face is always popular. Hearers smack their lips over it; their faces beam as they listen, and they talk about it appreciatively for days afterwards.

A like attitude of mind is apparent in regard to those forms of literature in which the evil practices and tendencies of the age are mercilessly denounced. Such writings have a large circulation. Men read with avidity, even with enjoyment, descriptions of the frauds and hypocrisies of a society of which they form a part. There is no reddening of the cheek of the individual, no personal conviction of sin. Each passenger apparently can sit on deck and read with gusto of how rotten all her timbers are, and how certainly the vessel is settling down.

A singular phenomenon this, and one of the many causes of the ineffectiveness of preaching. The pulpit will never exert the regenerating influence it is capable of exercis-

ing in our social and national life until each man goes to church prepared to listen for himself. The singular absence of personal conviction of guilt in modern society is probably an effect of our elaborate social organization. The consciousness of individual merit or shortcoming is enfeebled as the sense of collective responsibility deepens. 'The conscience is, of course, the most important of the springs of human action. In proportion as the individual charges himself with soliciting and following its oracles, his character is fortified and concentrated, his individuality intensified. In proportion as he resigns this charge into other hands, he places the true centre of his moral nature outside himself, his individuality becomes less marked, and his relations to others more sensible, more important.' Owing to our elaborately organized existence the feeling of blame is, as it were, vaporized, thinned, spread out, until as individuals we are not conscious of its existence. We are only officially accountable for wrong-doing; we sin and repent through our representatives. Evils exist in manifold form all around us,

evils that ought to be removed ; but the odium which their persistence creates is laid upon the shoulders of the limited company, or the municipality, or the parliament. What in more primitive times would have been brought home to the one is now spread out over the many, and it is difficult to make a cloak that covers the whole body pinch tightly any single member. So much of our existence is arranged for us by external authority that for its failures and transgressions we blame instinctively, not ourselves, but the powers that be.

Here then is emphasized for those who worship in our churches an important branch of self-culture. The conscience of the individual must be quickened, and warned against relegating its functions and responsibilities to the conscience of the community. We have heard much of 'the Nonconformist conscience,' what we need to hear more of is the personal conscience. Each man must come to feel that his share in a company includes not only the amount of the capital he has invested, but a moral association of himself with its

action and influence; and that while he is pleased to receive dividends, he must also be willing to accept responsibility—that the great social order of which he forms a part cannot stand between himself and the judgement seat of God.

In this quickening of the individual conscience the pulpit will doubtless take its share, as it has done in the past; but it must be more largely aided by the co-operation of the hearer. The practice of listening for others rather than for ourselves must be discouraged. When the temptation arises to say, 'How beautifully that fits the case of Mrs. A——!' or 'How exactly that hits the faults of Mr. B——!' it must be at once resisted, and a strenuous endeavour made to bring the application nearer home. The readiness with which we appropriate the comfort and encouragement of the sermon must be extended to all its bearings. We must be prepared to accept reproof as well as solace, correction as well as inspiration. Admiration of a faithful ministry must include a readiness to accept its wounding with its balm, and our appreciation

of its fidelity must be shown by allowing it to fasten our sins upon our conscience, and to work in us repentance and reformation. If we go to the house of God in a humble, teachable state of mind, we shall frequently hear the sermon say, 'Thou art the man!' and through the shame and humiliation of our conviction shall be led to the enjoyment of a deeper peace and a fuller righteousness.

ON HEARING PROPORTIONATELY

Seize upon truth where'er 'tis found,
Amongst your friends, amongst your foes,
On Christian or on heathen ground:
The flower's divine where'er it grows;
Neglect the prickles, and assume the rose.

Epigrams Ancient and Modern.

ON HEARING PROPORTIONATELY

IT would be distinctly unfortunate were any one to infer from what has been said on continuity in hearing that all the parts of a sermon are to be treated as of equal importance. All should be listened to, but all should not be listened to alike. Hearing at a dead level is no more desirable than speaking at a dead level ; the accents of the ear are as amenable to modulation as the accents of the tongue.

He who listens proportionately will not lay the same stress on an illustration as on an argument, nor regard a pleasantry as of equal importance with a proposition. Any one who has paid attention to the demeanour of a congregation must have been impressed with the false quantities exhibited in its appreciations. To what a low station will a popular assembly relegate the best ; to what a height will it lift

the worst ! Into what a frenzy of delight it is flung by a mouldy jest ; how coldly it will receive the highest wisdom expressed in the choicest words ! A flash of coarse humour will let loose thunders of applause ; the eloquent enforcement of a great principle will evoke a wide-mouthed yawn. Every public speaker knows the mortification of having his copper scrambled for and his gold left untouched.

Proportionate hearing implies the rectification of these false weights and measures ; the redistribution of emphasis, the lifting of the approving accent from that which is weak to that which is strong, from that which is hollow to that which is substantial, from that which is puerile and unworthy to that which is lovely and of good report.

There are essayists to-day whose aim it is to carve a reputation out of paradox, and who succeed in winning a transient notoriety from a barefaced reversal of the verdicts of the past. The reader has only to think the opposite of whatever has been thought, and the whole secret of their manner is unfolded to him ; for

their cheap and sole originality consists in impertinently and extravagantly endeavouring to unsay all that the ages before them have uttered and what the ages after them will confirm. In like manner there are preachers whose popularity, and it is often wide, is mainly based on eccentricity of utterance. Plain clothes would sink them into nonentities. They are extraordinary in proportion as they are extravagant. Their words must wear the motley of burlesque. Each sermon is wetted with a sprinkling of these oddities of speech—offspring of sore travail, though always given to men as of easy birth. The newspapers record them, and their admirers repeat them—and that is all they do repeat. Whatever else these children of genius may say, the world hears nothing of it. The flashes are enough, the intervals between the flashes, of what account are they? The sermons of such preachers are not to be heard proportionately; there would be so little to bear away. Who knows to what straits some prancing reputations might be reduced if they were made to stand on all fours, instead of tilting it on

brightly garnished forelegs? Better leave them on their self-chosen elevation, remembering that, verily, they have their reward.

One error from which proportionate hearing would save the man in the pew is that of laying undue emphasis on the omissions or scanty allusions of the pulpit. Much misrepresentation arises from this habit. It is frequently charged against a preacher that his sermon contained no reference to the atonement, or original sin, or the divinity of Christ, or the resurrection, when the very nature of the discourse precluded any but the most cursory allusion to such topics. Let the subject be the reconciliation of man to God, and an entire lack of reference to the atonement will seem inexcusable; let it be the discovery of Joseph to his brethren, or the government of the tongue, or the nature of prayer, and such reference may be legitimately excluded. There are subjects in which the fundamental doctrines of Christianity will be elaborately dealt with, there are others in which it will be equally proper to allude to them but casually or even to leave them unnamed.

The hearer must never allow himself to interpret the theology of the preacher by the stress of his accents in a single sermon. He might as justly endeavour to divine a man's political opinions from a few flying remarks on the orbits of comets. To a person of penetrating insight, one sermon may reveal much of the preacher's intellectual and moral quality, but, confined as it usually is, to a single topic, it can hardly expound his doctrinal position. Sermons are almost unavoidably lop-sided; they are houses in which the preacher entertains a few truths, to the necessary exclusion of others. You cannot welcome all your friends to one party; but it by no means follows that those who are left uninvited are therefore discarded. Those whom you cannot entertain in October, you will perhaps invite in December; and those for whom you cannot find room in December, you will be pleased to see in the new year. In like manner no preacher puts the whole of his creed into one sermon, not even the whole of his thoughts on one subject. If he be a man of any mental grip, he will survey a truth from many sides, and in placing

its various aspects before his congregation, he may lean now in one direction, now in another. An indiscriminating hearer may accuse him of a bias towards this or a tendency towards that ; he might as reasonably accuse the meteorologist of being a lover of water or a worshipper of fire, because he is compelled by atmospheric conditions to predict a deluge in one week and an outburst of heat in another. A preacher must be judged by spacious breadths of utterance, even as the climate of a country is determined by observations taken in many quarters and extended over a long period.

The beats of the hearer's baton should synchronize as far as possible with the accents in the preacher's mind. No preacher expects all his words to be treated alike ; he does not so treat them himself. Some he hurries over, others he lingers upon ; some are mere loops knitting his sentences together, others are charged with messages of high import. The hearing vouchsafed them should accord with their rank and functions ; nor can you fail to discredit an intelligent preacher when you offer to the mere lackeys of his speech the

same honour you concede to ambassadors and kings.

John Wesley relates how he preached with exceeding plainness to a crowded audience at Sheffield on 'Now is it high time to awake out of sleep.' A hearer wrote him a letter afterwards, but all he could remember of the sermon was, that 'rising early was good for the nerves,'—an apt illustration of misplaced emphasis on the part of the listener.

The man in the pulpit will have solid ground of complaint until the man in the pew adopts a juster method of valuation, until he distributes the accents of attention and memory more discriminately, until he hears proportionately, not carrying away of the sermon that which he might preferably leave behind, and not leaving behind that which beyond all else he should carry away.

ON HEARING CRITICALLY

Judge not the preacher, for he is thy Judge :
If thou mislike him, thou conceiv'st him not.
God calleth preaching folly. Do not grudge
To pick out treasures from an earthen pot.
The worst speaks something good.

HERBERT.

ON HEARING CRITICALLY

MODESTY forbids a universal criticism of books. It is felt that some intellectual equipment is requisite to entitle a man to sit in judgement on a seriously written volume ; but anybody, from an errand boy up to a chief justice, may say what he thinks of a sermon, and the less qualified he is to judge, the more pronounced and dogmatic will be his opinions. Men feel a certain amount of hesitation in fixing the status of a writer or a musician or a statesman, but to sum up a preacher is as easy as to order dinner.

Such a condition of things would be amusing were it not seriously to be deprecated. If the Bible be what Carlyle calls 'the most earnest of books,' surely those whose business it is to expound and enforce its teaching deserve more respectful treatment. It cannot

be in the interests of the community that those who are supposed to be the exponents of its loftiest ideals, its most sacred yearnings, should be subject to a criticism less serious than that bestowed on cooks or dressmakers. We call the preacher an ambassador for Christ, and yet hardly vouchsafe his utterances the respect we accord to a leading article.

Something is out of adjustment, or such an anomaly could not exist. Either we place the pulpit too high or the man who occupies it too low ; either we should denude the preacher of his rank, or render him the reverence that is his due. Men may let loose their wit upon the gods when godhead no longer counts, and they may criticize the preacher as freely as they do the prophet of the weather if the vocation of the one is no more important than that of the other ; but if the preacher comes to us as the messenger of the Most High, a flippant treatment of his message is grossly out of place.

If this high view of his vocation be not pressed, and the man in the pulpit be regarded simply as a teacher of religion, on a level

with the teacher of morals, even then the lack of seriousness with which his work and person are frequently discussed is not to be excused. Religion is either nothing or everything. It cannot be put on the same level as literature or art or political economy. If its assumptions are well founded, nothing higher can engage the thoughts of men ; if they are baseless, the task of exposing their insufficiency is one of the most important in which we can be engaged ; in neither alternative is there room for a light-headed frivolity.

I am not arguing for an undue veneration of the preacher based on sacerdotal assumptions ; I am content for the moment to accept him as a mere teacher of religion, and on that ground to urge the claim for a more respectful appraisement of his position and a more sober criticism of his words.

Criticism there must be. It cannot be avoided. The entire suspension of it would be wholesome for neither preacher nor hearer. There are, of course, hearers who never criticize at all. I know some from whose lips there never falls a syllable of depreciation.

To them a sermon is never either too long or too short, too broad or too narrow, too simple or too learned; it is always satisfying, and the last is always better than all that have gone before. They are never known to utter a complaint or to suggest an improvement. To their deferential ears all voices are agreeable, and if you disclose not the name of the preacher, they will be as delighted with a plough-boy as with St. Chrysostom or even the Apostle Paul.

Fortunately all hearers are not of this characterless description. There are many of sound judgement, and some of penetrative insight, and it is better for both pew and pulpit that expression should be given to their opinions. Such informed and capable criticism differs entirely from the 'hare-brained chatter of irresponsible frivolity.' It speaks with intelligence and a sense of responsibility, and every right-minded preacher will accord due weight to its judgements.

There is probably no preacher who does not owe a debt of gratitude to criticism of this sort, criticism which has disclosed to him

faults of utterance, or gesture, or style, or matter, that otherwise would have remained uncorrected. 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend,' and an intelligent hearer renders a valuable service, especially to a young preacher, when he apprises him kindly of defects that he might be slow to discover for himself. Of course the hearer will not fail to remember that in such cases the value of the surgery hinges greatly on the skill with which it is exercised, and instead of flaunting his lancet will conceal it in a sponge. Such a service when sensibly rendered will seldom be resented. When it is, when a supersensitive self-conceit turns impatiently against the hand that would wound only to bless, it may be taken for granted that the case is one in which an operation was imperatively required.

Speaking generally, it can hardly be doubted that a freer exercise of such criticism would tend to increase the effectiveness of the pulpit. The preacher occupies a unique position, in that no one at the moment can reply to his statements. He may utter what to his congregation seems the most arrant nonsense

or the most outrageous insolence, and yet, without violating the decencies of public worship, no protest can be made. Anthony Trollope has noted this in strong terms: 'There is, perhaps, no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilized and free countries than the necessity of listening to sermons. No one but a preaching clergyman has, in these realms, the power of compelling an audience to sit silent and be tormented. No one but a preaching clergyman can revel in platitudes, truisms, and untruths, and yet receive, as his undisputed privilege, the same respectful demeanour as though words of impassioned eloquence or persuasive logic fell from his lips. Let a professor of law or physic find his place in a lecture-room, and there pour forth jejune words and useless, empty phrases, and he will pour them forth to empty benches. Let a barrister attempt to talk without talking well, and he will talk but seldom. A judge's charge need be listened to perforce by none but the jury, prisoner, and gaoler. A member of Parliament can be coughed down or counted out. Town

councillors can be tabooed. But no one can rid himself of the preaching clergyman. He is the bore of the age, the old man whom we Sinbads cannot shake off, the nightmare that disturbs our Sunday's rest, the incubus that overloads our religion, and makes God's service distasteful. We are not forced into church! No, but we desire more than that. We desire not to be forced to stay away. We desire—nay, we are resolute—to enjoy the comfort of public worship; but we desire also that we may do so without an amount of tedium which ordinary human nature cannot endure with patience, that we may be able to leave the house of God without that anxious longing for escape which is the common consequence of common sermons.'

The point to be noted in this rather strenuous indictment is the fact that, owing to the linking of the sermon with public worship, the preacher is lifted into an isolation of privilege, vested with a monopoly of deference, such as no other public speaker can claim. A position like that creates of itself a necessity for criticism. Without it the most frightful abuses might be

perpetrated, and that they were perpetrated in the name of religion would but confer upon them a loftier sanction. All history bears testimony to the fact that religious monopolists are as prone as others to the exaggerated exercise of power. Where the disposition to be arbitrary is found, neither law nor gospel restrains. The pulpit is no exception, and its own well-being and the public good demand that it shall be subjected to criticism. This, provided it be intelligent and discriminating, is always beneficial.

Personally I am of opinion that it would be well for congregations to speak their minds more freely on these matters, assuming that they always speak with Christian temper and forbearance. In private conversation allusions are frequent to the antediluvian character of much pulpit teaching. It is condemned as intolerable, or ridiculed good-naturedly as something not entering into the world's count, or perhaps adduced as an illustration of moral obliquity on the part of the preacher akin to that which he condemns so vigorously in the commercial practice of his hearers. If these

things are whispered in secret, why are they not proclaimed on the housetop? If they were, and a proper public opinion created, demanding of the pulpit that in culture and thought and freshness, in intellectual life and spiritual power, it should keep itself abreast of the times, a revolution would be wrought in the life of many a preacher for which he would bless through all time the intelligence and fidelity of the man in the pew.

ON HEARING PRACTICALLY

Good thoughts are no better than good dreams, unless they be executed.

EMERSON.

ON HEARING PRACTICALLY

I REMEMBER once hearing a sermon on the duty of seeking reconciliation with those who have offended us, which so affected one of the listeners that she went straightway to the house of a near relative, and did her utmost to bring to naught an unhappy feud that existed between them. There are examples, too, of men restoring what they had secretly purloined, or stopping midway in a course of crime, arrested by some preacher's word; but when we reflect on the multiplicity of the preachers, how small seems the amount of the reformation! how little game is bagged for the number of guns employed!

It will probably be found on examination that the more preaching becomes an established institution the less it has of immediate and practical effect. To a regular call we pay

slighter heed than to an occasional voice. If the sermon were frequently to drop out of the service, if indeed it were only introduced when the preacher was stirred by some great inspiration or the people roused by some moving event, it would doubtless be productive of greater results.

At the present it has come to be too much looked upon as the weekly entertainment of a sober life. Large numbers of people to whom the theatre and the opera are a forbidden land, and who look upon other forms of recreation as too worldly, have recourse to the sermon as a substitute. With multitudes the ordinary Sunday morning question is, How did you enjoy the sermon? and the whole service is measured by the reply.

Where this temper prevails, hearing to profit hardly enters into the situation. We do not anticipate from a concert or a magic-lantern exhibition any great awakening of the intellectual and moral nature; nor can the sermon that is treated as entertainment be expected to lay a strong hand on thought and conduct.

If by some mental necromancy we could

enter into the minds of men on their way to church on a Sunday morning, and read their thoughts, how seldom we should hear them ask, ' Shall I be stirred to better living to-day ? Will the preacher lift me into a clearer atmosphere ? will he deepen my hatred to evil, and hasten my steps in the quest of good ? ' Nor is it likely that, if we could listen to their ruminations after the sermon, we should hear them say, ' I must pay that debt ; I must settle that quarrel ; I must master this passion ; I must help that neighbour of mine. ' Is not the success of the sermon usually measured by the enjoyment extracted from it ? and would not the mental comments we should hear be similar to those dropped on the steps of the concert-hall or at the exits of the theatre ?

A gentleman very anxious to promote the spiritual benefit of one of his acquaintance took him to hear a celebrated preacher. As they walked home together after the service, his heart beat tremulously in anticipation of the result, and what was his amazement on hearing his companion exclaim excitedly, ' By heaven, I would give five pounds to know

that man's tailor!' All that had impressed him was the cut of the preacher's coat, and his most burning desire was to know where he could procure one of like faultlessness. That was practical hearing, though hardly of the highest order. Was it not better, though, than the purely passive enjoyment that seems to content so many? If it brought an additional order to the tradesman concerned, it was surely worth more to the universe at large than the state of mind that is satisfied with congratulating itself on having had a pleasant time. Perhaps it was an extreme case; and yet in spirit there is not much difference between the man whose contentment with the sermon is due solely to charm of speech or manner and the man who reaps from the preacher nothing beyond delight at the fashion of his garments.

Doubtless for much of this unpractical hearing the blame is to be laid at the door of the man in the pulpit. So often are sermons remote from every-day concerns—flights of rhetoric touching life only at straggling points, academical disquisitions devoid of the humanity that is worn with care and dips its face in tears—

that the hearer feels them far away as the mountains of the moon. One of the psychological problems of to-day, and perhaps of all times, is the clerical obtuseness that persists in discussing with ponderous verbosity matters in which not even a microscope can discover for the ordinary layman an atom of interest. Wherever the preacher deals as a man with the affairs of men, his hearers have themselves to blame if their lives take not a higher shape from his words.

One thing fatal to all practical hearing is the notion that the sermon is done with as soon as it is finished, and yet this is how it is commonly treated. We listen with more or less attention until the voice in the pulpit dies away, and then depart, generally with a self-satisfied feeling of having fulfilled a duty, but seldom to concern ourselves any further about it. To give the sermon any chance at all, it should be supplemented by a season of quiet thought, in which its teaching will be pondered, its points rehearsed, and an endeavour made to bring it into fertilizing contact with our thought and life. If this were to become the habit of each

hearer, who can doubt that much seed that is now wasted on the service would sink deeper and bring forth fruit? It was doubtless to induce such a habit of mind that John Wesley urged his people to be silent in their coming and going, as when he says: 'But there is a worse indecency than this creeping in among us—talking in the preaching-houses, before and after service. How shall this be cured? Let all the preachers join as one man, and the very next Sunday they preach in any place enlarge on the impropriety of talking before and after service, and strongly exhort them to do it no more. In three months, if we are in earnest, this vile practice will be banished out of every Methodist congregation. Let none stop till he has carried his point.'

Whatever be our custom in this regard, no pulpit teaching will affect us greatly until we come to understand that moral and spiritual truth can only be appropriated to the extent to which it is practised. Life is its great interpreter, and only from her lips do we gather its highest meanings. He who does not know something of love, from the affection with which

he clings to human beings and denies himself for their good, will never reach to its essence through the words to which he listens in the pew. And as with love, so with all the graces of the Christian character: their full beauty will only dawn on him who finds for them flowering space in his own being. What bread is to him who has only seen the loaf upon the table, never eaten of it and been made strong, so is Christian truth to him who knows it only as a sound from the pulpit or a word from a book. He only is the practical hearer who can say, 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.'

PREPARATION FOR HEARING

In all negotiations of difficulty a man may not look to sow and reap at once, but must prepare business, and so ripen it by degrees.

BACON'S *Essays*.

PREPARATION FOR HEARING

IF the man who stands in the pulpit is accounted negligent when he fails to prepare for the Sabbath, what of him who sits in the pew? Rests there no obligation on his shoulders? Shall he glide into his seat on a Sunday morning with less thought than he drops into his office chair? Comes there to him no call to trim his lamp and put oil in his vessel? Is the door of opportunity not frequently shut against him because he has given no heed to the advent of the bridegroom?

When duly considered, how unreasonable the expectation appears that, so far as the sermon is concerned, we should reap where we have not sowed, and gather where we have not strawed. The assurance with which we proceed to the sanctuary, place ourselves in

the pew, and wait complacently to be edified without having bestowed a farthing's worth of thought on the matter beforehand, is truly amazing. Before going to consult the doctor, we collect our thoughts and make a mental recapitulation of our symptoms ; if about to pay a visit to the lawyer, we get our letters and papers in order ; before making the round of the picture-gallery, we furnish ourselves with a catalogue ; even before submitting to have a tooth extracted, we are drawn by pain into kindly thoughts of the dentist ; but into the hands of the preacher we pass as carelessly as we fling an old envelope into the waste-paper basket.

Is it surprising that the man in the pew should so often bewail the dullness of the pulpit, when he does so little to bring himself into sensitive relation with it ? He who wishes to receive should seek to make himself receptive ; he who would eat should do something to create an appetite. Very commendable in this respect is the practice of the Quaker, that silent meditation by which he fits himself for utterance or hearkening.

‘Frequently,’ says Charles Lamb, ‘the meeting is broken up without a word having been spoken. But the mind has been fed. You go away with a sermon not made with hands.’

It may be said that the earlier parts of the service—the singing and chanting, the lessons and prayers—make ready the mind of the hearer to receive the truth, and this is doubtless true ; but it would be true in much larger measure if the service in the sanctuary were preceded by some amount of quiet preparation at home. A few minutes on our knees, or in company with our Bible or some book of a devotional character, would work in us a greater fitness for worship.

You have noticed how, in passing suddenly from the glare of day into the shade of a dimly illuminated church, you stand for a few moments bewildered, almost blind ; but when your eye has grown accustomed to the subdued light, what was at first obscure, a niche, a carving, an inscription, emerges clearly into view. Could we linger for a moment in the half-light of the vestibule, the contrast would not be so striking. In like manner

are we conscious of a certain unfitness of soul when we pass directly from the glare and clatter of the secular into the hush and shadow of the divine. It were better if the home could be made a little more frequently the vestibule of the church, where, lingering for a moment, our spirits could be attuned. A true lover of harmony never takes kindly to the scraping and tightening of strings that forms the prelude to a concert. It is needful for the instruments to be brought into accord; but how much better if it could be accomplished in some antechamber, out of sight and out of hearing! In a religious service the preacher has most of the work of tuning to perform himself, with but fitful aid from those who are to be lifted into the proper key; nor is it to be wondered at if many, failing to respond to his touch, remain discordant to the end.

‘After glancing my eye over the design and order of a new book,’ says Gibbon, ‘I suspended the perusal till I had finished the work of self-examination, till I had revolved in a solitary walk all that I knew or believed

or had thought on the subject of the whole work, or of some particular chapter. I was then qualified to discern how much the author added to my original stock; and if I was sometimes satisfied by the agreement, I was sometimes warned by the opposition of our ideas.' John Morley, in one of his essays, noting this practice, goes on to say, 'It is also told of Strafford, that, before reading any book for the first time, he would call for a sheet of paper, and then proceed to write down upon it some sketch of the ideas that he already had upon the subject of the book, and of the questions that he expected to find answered. No one who has been at the pains to try the experiment will doubt the usefulness of this practice: it gives to our acquisitions from books clearness and reality, a right place and an independent shape.' A somewhat similar benefit might accrue to the hearer, if by a process of self-examination he were to test how much he knows or only thinks he knows of religious truth, before going to listen to the sermon.

Every teacher knows how helpful to the

giving of a lesson is the preparation of the pupils, how their progress is hindered or accelerated by previous neglect or study. The hearer cannot of course prepare in an exactly similar manner for the preacher, inasmuch as he knows not beforehand what the subject of the sermon is to be. The text is one of the surprises the pulpit holds in reserve to the proper moment; in many cases it is the only surprise it has to give. It might be well if it were not so, if pulpit talk would drop its desultory and haphazard character, and become a regular and ordered system. If theology be as important as preachers declare, then it would be well for it to be taught in systematic fashion; if the Bible merits the high position assigned to it, then surely some sustained and methodical endeavour should be made to expound its contents and history.

The present methods of the pulpit are a disgrace to all concerned. They are as erratic as the flight of a butterfly, as uncertain as meteorological predictions. Who knows what his minister will preach about next Sunday

morning? Who expects to know? Peradventure one might go on to ask, Who desires to know? The lack of system on the one side and the lack of interest on the other are equally deplorable. Courses of sermons are sometimes delivered, and where the preacher is alive and understands his business they are of great value; in other cases they are so monotonous and dreary as to drive the congregation to the verge of madness. There can be no doubt, however, in the mind of any intelligent student of the times, as to what is needed if the pulpit is to be redeemed from ineptitude and contempt. It must relinquish the methods of its childhood, adapt itself sternly to the requirements of the day, recognize to the full the revolution that has taken place in our modes of estimating the universe and man's relation thereto, and set itself earnestly to become the exponent of the highest and best in the thought and feeling of the age.

In the accomplishment of this it must seek more definitely to obtain the sympathy and co-operation of the intelligence to which it

addresses itself. It must cease to be a retailer of religious titbits and pious scraps. It must make a study of great subjects, grapple manfully with the problems and duties of the day. Much of the scrappy reading of our times, deplored by the preachers of all churches, is due to their own methods. They have so accustomed the religious mind to disjointed and fragmentary thinking that sustained mental effort has grown distasteful and flabbiness and superficiality become the vogue.

If matters are to be improved, the man in the pulpit must recognize much more definitely than he does at present that neither religious conviction nor the character which is its outcome can be based on weak intellectual foundations, that mind and heart must be trained together. His strongest appeal must be to the intelligence of his congregation: where it does not exist, he must create it; where it is feeble, he must quicken it; where it is vigorous, he must direct it. Let there be established an interplay of mind between the pulpit and the pew, regular, mutual, sympathetic, each taking the other into its

confidence, and both working together, and it will come to pass that, while the preacher labours to fit himself for utterance, the hearer, understanding his plans and aims, will also prepare himself to listen. Possibly we shall live to see the day when there will be, not only a list of lessons for the Sunday school, but a syllabus of subjects for the pulpit, and when the obligation to give some thought during the week to what is to be discussed on the Sabbath will be felt no less by the scholar than the teacher, no less by the man in the pew than by the man in the pulpit.

BAD MANNERS IN HEARING

Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for
courtesy.

EMERSON.

BAD MANNERS IN HEARING

HOW often is a preacher spoiled by a mannerism! It may seem but a trifle, the stroking of his hair, the biting of his lips, the thumbing of his coat, the fondling of his moustache, or some other thoughtless play of hand or limb, and yet it may edge the teeth of his hearers, and snap the bonds of fellowship between himself and them. In such things, too, the pew may become an echo of the pulpit, and the hearer a fret and disturbance to the preacher or to others by unhappy lapses of demeanour.

Lolling may be cited as an instance, and one for which it is not easy to frame an excuse. Sprawling can hardly be designated a classical attitude; and of all the inelegant ways of taking possession of a seat, to spread oneself over it like an avalanche is perhaps the worst.

What an unhappy revelation it is of a man's nature when, as soon as the sermon begins, he settles loungingly down in the corner of his pew, a picture of irreverent indolence! Does he ever ask himself what would become of the preacher if all the audience behaved in like manner? how he could proceed if compelled to address five hundred such stretched-out sacks of humanity? To sit up straight might cost an effort, but it would at least aid digestion, and would certainly be a sign of better manners. A man would hardly be thought courtly who lolled in the presence of his king, and less can be said for the veneration of him who lounges through a service offered to the King of kings.

What shall be said of whispering? Accounted bad form in company, is it any more excusable in church? Shall the manners of the sanctuary be less becoming than those of the drawing-room?

Organists and choirs are frequent transgressors in this respect. It is wonderful how much they have to say to each other. Their communications are as frequent as those of

an attacking army, and often exceedingly distracting. I have been hampered and almost brought to a standstill many times by their whispering voices around or behind me.

A whisper is an insignificant and to many minds a harmless noise, but its power to disturb is out of all proportion to the vibrations it produces in the atmosphere. A shout or a thunderclap would sometimes be less distressful than its penetrating pinge upon the nerves. Much relief would accrue to many preachers if it could be arranged that all the whispering should be done in the street outside before the service begins. Whispering winds may be delightful in poetry, but the less breath there is expended in that form during the sermon the better will the man in the pulpit get through his work. The whisperer should also bear in mind how disturbing the sibilation of his lips may be, not only to the preacher, but to those around. If careless about listening ourselves, there is a law of politeness which enjoins upon us regard for the comfort of others.

Sleeping in church has recently been taken

up from a physiological standpoint, a medical man having affirmed that it is largely due to ill-ventilated buildings. There is much truth in this contention. Ventilation is either a lost or an undiscovered art, and even where the system is tolerable those responsible for its working are often negligent. Get a well-filled church, and you are certain to have a vitiated atmosphere, and on the part of many worthy people a struggle to keep awake ; for it is not always the undevout that yield to soporific influences. I remember a good man to whom drowsiness under the sermon was a grievous trial. He sought relief in all manner of devices, even to the pricking of himself with a pin ; but it was years before he was able to conquer the habit, and probably, when it came, the victory was due not so much to his determination as to changes in his bodily constitution. I know of no general remedy, but perhaps most of those who suffer would find a more sparing diet on the Sabbath conducive to wakefulness. To listen well after a heavy meal is impossible, even though the preacher be an angel : mists cloud the brain,

and to catch the preacher's thoughts is as difficult as to gather fruit that is covered with a blanket. People who fast at all generally do so on a Friday; it would probably be to the advantage of both preacher and hearer if the abstinence were carried over to the Sunday.

Certainly no one should yield to sleep without a struggle; if he is to be vanquished, it should only be after hard resistance. Many now troubled with drowsiness on the Sunday morning would find themselves more wakeful if they went to bed earlier on the Saturday evening. The late hours prevalent in large towns have done much to dull the freshness and beauty of the Sabbath.

Coughing demands a word. It is a practice disturbing to both preacher and congregation, and indulged to a quite unnecessary extent. More than half the coughing one hears is superfluous. People cough unconsciously and out of all reason. They allow a tickling throat to carry them away like an unruly horse. A little tightening of the reins would bring the steed into subjection; in many instances the

gallop would become a canter, in others the animal would remain motionless.

The yawn is even more terrible than the cough. It has more significance and menace in it. It may have a purely physical origin, or it may be the expression of an overwhelming mental weariness. In the manner of them, there are yawns and yawns. Some are soft, delicate, almost unheard, like the lifting of wings under a light burden of snow; others are loud, boisterous, ungainly, like the escape of air from a punctured tyre; and when one of these invades the sermon, he will be a strong preacher whose spirit is not broken. Such a proclamation of weariness, what mortal can withstand?

The yawn is demoralizing, but there are other practices almost equally reprehensible. I have watched a youth take up his Bible, and continue to read it during a large part of the sermon, directly under the preacher's eye. Seated close behind him, I could see that, while the text was in one of St. Paul's epistles, his reading was confined to the Book of Genesis. This was done on several

Sundays, but on the occasion referred to the sermon was of such an interesting nature that it was impossible to cite the preacher's dullness as an excuse for the ill manners. Bible reading is a commendable practice, and one over which most Christian people might well spend more time than they do, but it is to be hoped there are few unmannerly enough to associate with it such palpable rudeness.

Another impropriety of which the man in the pew is not infrequently guilty is that of ostentatiously consulting his watch at the beginning or, worse still, during the progress of the discourse. To time the preacher is innocent enough, if it be done without seeming to betray impatience of his words ; but to show by the handling of our chronometer that we are weary of his efforts is hardly evidence of good breeding.

All these minor moralities of the pew would insensibly right themselves if we could but be imbued with that Christian courtesy the essence of which is tender consideration for the feelings of others. There are a thousand thoughtless acts and attitudes from which it

would deliver us. Obedience to the golden rule is our truest safeguard—putting ourselves in the place of others, and doing unto them as we would have them do to us. The spirit of Christ is that perfect charity which is always more ready to suffer itself than to give pain to others. It divines instinctively what it must do and what it must avoid, lest the nerve of another be jarred, his heart discouraged, or his spirit grieved. Let this pervade our bearing, and neither those who preach to us nor those who listen with us will have cause to turn upon us eyes of reproach.

HEARING FOR THE FUTURE

Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.

1 TIM. vi. 19.

HEARING FOR THE FUTURE

SERMONS are often misfits. They do not always tally with the mood and circumstances of the hearer. When moods are so changeable and circumstances so varied, it would be marvellous if they did. You go to church on a Sunday morning, and find the sermon so exactly adapted to your needs that you imagine the preacher has thought of no case but yours through all the preceding week. You go again on the following Sunday, and lo, his words are alien, afar off, out of touch with every chord in your being.

Such contrarieties are frequent. In the infinite variations of experience it happens again and again that the preacher stands on a mount of joy, and his shout of triumph passes unheeded over the head of him who weeps on the plain below ; or out of the vale of

tears he raises a song of consolation for which the heart of a joyous listener finds neither room nor welcome. A man in the heyday of success can hardly be expected to listen responsively to a sermon on the sweet uses of adversity, nor one suffering from affliction or misfortune be blamed for not entering enthusiastically into a discourse that emphasizes the felicities of human life.

The wise thing in such circumstances is not to close the ear and yield oneself to the vagaries of a wandering mind, but to strive out of the ill-fitting material of the present to extract provision for the future. It does not follow because I am joyful to-day that I may not be sorrowful to-morrow, or because I am in trouble now that I may not take a laugh with joy hereafter. There is hardly a condition dealt with by the pulpit that I may not have to pass through in coming days; let me then husband for myself out of present words a supply for future needs.

This is the principle on which all education is conducted. Lessons are not always adapted to the mood of the pupil. He learns by faith,

not by sight ; and must be content to master much, the utility of which is not apparent at present. It is only maturer years that will bring to him opportunities to expend the wealth he has hoarded in youth ; and he who is foolish enough to absorb only what present needs demand will find himself but ill equipped for the exigencies of the future.

Here is a suggestive passage from a letter of Joseph de Maistre : ‘ Let your brother work hard at the French poets. Let him learn them by heart, especially the incomparable Racine ; never mind whether he understands him yet or not. I did not understand him when my mother used to come repeating his verses by my bedside, and lulled me to sleep with her fine voice to the sound of that inimitable music. I knew hundreds of lines long before I knew how to read ; and it is thus that my ears, accustomed betimes to this ambrosia, have never since been able to endure any sourer draught.’ A striking illustration of how even the imperfectly apprehended instruction of earlier days may prove of unexpected service in after years.

The following extract from Ruskin's *Præterita* bears testimony in the same direction. Speaking of his mother's early training of him, he writes :

‘ As soon as I was able to read with fluency, she began a course of Bible work with me, which never ceased till I went to Oxford. She read alternate verses with me, watching, at first, every intonation of my voice, and correcting the false ones, till she made me understand the verse, if within my reach, rightly and energetically. It might be beyond me altogether ; that she did not care about ; but she made sure that as soon as I got hold of it at all, I should get hold of it by the right end.

‘ In this way she began with the first verse of Genesis, and went straight through, to the last verse of the Apocalypse ; hard names, numbers, Levitical law, and all. . . . It is strange that of all the pieces of the Bible which my mother thus taught me, that which cost me most to learn, and which was, to my child's mind, chiefly repulsive—the 119th Psalm—has now become of all the most

precious to me in its overflowing and glorious passion of love for the Law of God, in opposition to the abuse of it by modern preachers of what they imagine to be His gospel.'

How what we have gleaned even unconsciously in the past may serve us in the future is very beautifully put by Emerson in his chapters on *Nature*. He says: 'We know more from nature than we can at will communicate. Its light flows into the mind ever more, and we forget its presence. The poet, the orator, bred in the woods, whose senses have been nourished by their fair and appeasing changes, year after year, without design and without heed, shall not lose their lesson altogether, in the roar of cities or the broil of politics. Long hereafter, amidst agitation and terror in national councils—in the hour of revolution—these solemn images shall reappear in their morning lustre, as fit symbols and words of the thoughts which the passing events shall awaken. At the call of a noble sentiment, again the woods wave, the pines murmur, the river rolls and shines, and the cattle low upon the mountains, as he saw and

heard them in his infancy. And with these forms, the spells of persuasion, the keys of power are put into his hands.'

A pilgrim with an empty wallet passed slowly through the land, and at the houses by the wayside besought him alms. He hungered greatly, yet no one offered him bread ; parched were his lips, yet no one gave him drink. Many gifts were pressed upon him, but none that seemed to meet his needs. At one door he was offered a heavy staff, at a second a pair of well-worn sandals, at a third an old iron cross. Why should he burden himself with these ? Of what service was a staff to one whose limbs were strong, or sandals to one whose feet were hardened by the toils of the way, or a bit of iron to one whose need was food ?

Being wise of heart, he accepted all, and calmly pursued his way. After many weary miles in the heat he rested beneath a wayside tree, and not far from where he sat spied a large cocoa-nut which had fallen from the branches. And now he was glad of the iron cross he had hugged so far ; and drawing it

from his wallet, he cracked the shell, drank of the milk, and was wonderfully refreshed. Then started he forth once more ; but soon the road grew unkind, and the sharp stones with which it was studded wounded his feet till blood marked all the way. Now he be-thought him of the sandals, and, fastening the straps around his ankles, was able to continue his journey in comfort. Many days afterwards, as he rested on a sunny bank, a serpent glided out of the long grass, and would have smitten him with its poisonous fangs, but just as it was about to strike he seized the staff, and, bringing it swiftly down on the creature's head, laid it harmless at his feet.

The parable needs but slight interpretation. Again and again shall we hear from the pulpit what seems to have no bearing on our present condition ; yet, if we listen wisely, if, like the bees, we gather nectar from what seem unlikely flowers, we shall find when the winter of loss or age or affliction comes round that a treasure of honeyed sweetness has been laid in store.

True it is that he who listens for the future

may find, in the light of after days, that he has something to unlearn ; but every wise man has discovered that even this is a part of the education of life not to be despised. He who gathers even what has to be dropped by the way may find himself richer at the end than the soul which through over-prudence remains lean.

ON HEARING DEVOUTLY

Resort to sermons, but to prayers most:
Praying's the end of preaching.

HERBERT.

ON HEARING DEVOUTLY

HEARING, in the better days, will be lifted to the level of worship. We shall hear as we sing, as we pray—devotionally. The service will no longer be cut into sections, some of which are less sacred than the rest ; one spirit will pervade it throughout. All shall be given to God—the song, the prayer, the offertory, the sermon. No reservation will mar the unity of the sacrifice.

Much of our worship is secularized by the lack of this unity of spirit. We indulge in too many changes of climate. In the singing and the prayer we think of God ; in listening to the sermon we think of man. To some extent, maybe, this is unavoidable. It is natural that the preacher's manner and matter should turn our thoughts to him, to ourselves, to others. This diversion of thought is felt even in the

more devotional parts of the service ; but in the act of listening, the personality of the preacher is brought into more vivid contact with our own, and draws the outgoing of our nature towards himself.

Yet even here the spirit of worship need not be extinguished, nor even greatly diminished. The sermon may be heard, its outline mastered, its points estimated, its teaching received or rejected, and yet all the while the mind of the listener continue in a devotional frame. In this, as in all our actions, it is motive that determines character. It is the temper we maintain—not the exercises in which our spirits engage, but the atmosphere in which they dwell—that dissipates or intensifies devotion. Our hearts may be ablaze for God amid the clamouring distractions of the market—they may be cold and dead amid the chants and litanies of a cathedral.

Preaching seems to look manward alone, but it only secures the good of man as it promotes the glory of God ; achieving the one, it cannot fail of the other. The more exalted our conception of it, the easier it will be to make of

hearing an act of worship. We may conceive of it as the mere technical discussion of religious concerns, or we may conceive of it as the drawing near to us of God through the ministration of His truth. With all its imperfections of person and circumstance, it is the going forth of the Voice which in the beginning framed the worlds. Herein lies an eternal distinction between the utterances of the philosopher or the politician and those of the preacher: the one speaks for himself, the other speaks for God. The stammering of his utterance affects not in this sense the loftiness of his message; for 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.'

We contemplate with awe the vast forces of nature: we bend in reverence before the majesty of their outgoing, the terror or benignity of their aspect; and He who scattereth His snow

like wool, and His hoar-frost like ashes, He who openeth His springs and sendeth rain upon the earth, even He hath said : ' For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater : so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth : it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.'

Around the cradle of the Babe in Bethlehem two thousand years ago gathered shepherds and kings ; and around that Christ gather still the simple and kingly among the sons of men. He is the Word that was with God, and the Word that was God. Through Him have come to us the Eternal Truth, the Eternal Love, the Eternal Life. He is the Wisdom of God in a mystery, the Breath of God in a human soul ; and the truth incarnated in Him failed not from the earth when He passed from the sight of men. It abideth still, and those in whom God hath revealed His Son, and who have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, and walk not in

craftiness, nor handle the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, are empowered to say, 'Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.'

In every earnest sermon the Word is again made flesh, the Eternal Truth is clothed in human idioms and practical applications, and were we right-minded we should behold in it an incarnation, and, bending in reverence, would offer the best gifts of our spirits, richer than gold and frankincense and myrrh.

When God so draweth near to us, shall we not draw near to Him? When He thus calls, shall we not answer, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth'? When the Christ passeth by, shall we not press forward to touch the hem of His garment? When the Great Physician cometh, shall we not be healed of our diseases?

Is He not still the Worker of wonders, the Man who speaks as never man spake? Are not parables still dropping from His lips, and miracles issuing from His hands? Commandeth He not the blind to see, the dumb to speak, the deaf to hear, the dead to rise, as in the days of old? Behold we not a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues, who have washed their robes and made them white in His blood, and who serve Him day and night in this great temple of the earth; and shall all around be cleansed, and we remain unclean? shall others see His face, and have His name in their foreheads, and we be as those without, with our part taken away out of the Book of Life and out of the Holy City?

Ah! could we but have ears to hear, could we but see the Master behind the man that brings the message, the living Christ behind the mortal who speaks in His name, then should we listen as devoutly as we sing, as reverently as we pray; then, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we should be changed into the same image; then should we receive with

meekness the engrafted word, and attain the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls ; then should we eat of the bread of heaven and drink of the water of life, and be as those on whom death hath no more power.

CHILDREN AS HEARERS

7-10

The childhood shows the man as morning shows the day.
MILTON.

CHILDREN AS HEARERS

WE are not happy to-day in our treatment of the child. He is largely a new product, and our fingers are clumsy in the manipulation of him. We feel that he is not as those that went before, and yet we have not determined wherein the difference lies. There are many books written about him, but the writers have not emancipated themselves from the sentimental notions of the past, and made such a systematic study of his nature as the scientific methods of the day demand. He eludes our analysis; we have not overtaken him, not arrived at any determinate conclusions concerning him; hence our handling of him is tentative and irresolute. Perhaps he knows us better than we know him; perhaps he is the child of prophecy, and is leading us, though neither he nor we can tell whither.

One thing is plain to those who give thought to the subject : the reaction against the austere methods of the past is in danger of being carried too far. Our fathers were hard, we are almost sloppy ; they were disciplinarians, we are sentimentalists ; they showed an iron hand, we wear velvet gloves. From their extreme of sternness we seem bent on rushing to the opposite pole. We have not only discarded the rod, but have changed it into a sceptre, and, having passed it into the hands of our children, have made them kings. They are the rulers now, and only here and there is found a parent strong enough to question the new authority.

In this submission to the tyranny of childhood the family leads and the Church follows suit. Indulgence is the order of the day. What are many of our Sunday-school methods but bribes to a restiveness we know not how to tame ? Treats and rewards are multiplied, until a boy will hardly take off his cap without a fee. Attendance, punctuality, acquirement, behaviour, each is remunerated, each pursued because of the prize that dangles in front of

it. The modern child is in many instances an unwholesome compound of sophistication, impertinence, and irreverence—blinded by our foolish methods to the beauty of disinterested goodness, the charm of a virtue that is its own reward.

That there is a good side to the movement that seeks to make life interesting and attractive to the child no man of sense will deny. It is well that the cry of the children should be heard, that the ugly, cruel, degrading conditions of the bygone should pass away ; but it is not well that a policy of feeble and enfeebling indulgence should take their place.

It must not be forgotten that the men who make a mark on their generation are generally men whose childhood is subjected to a strict and, in many instances, a stern discipline. Few climb to greatness out of a childhood of sweetmeats and flowers. Wesley, Carlyle, Ruskin—what knew they of the luxuriant equipment of the nursery of to-day? And if they had known, how unlikely that their names would have lingered on the lips of men ! W. C. Collingwood, his biographer, speaking

of Ruskin's mother says : ' It seems that she did not consider her child as a toy, but as a trust ; to be taught by experience, or when that failed, to be punished into obedience and into something like her own self-control. When he tumbled downstairs she whipped him, that he might learn to be careful ; and he certainly acquired an adroitness and presence of mind which have often surprised his companions in mountain-climbing. When he came into dessert or played among the fruit-trees, she drew the line at one currant ; and there are few men of his artistic and poetical sort who are less tempted to self-indulgence in anything. When an affectionate aunt sent him a gaudy Punch and Judy they were put away, and he was thrown on his own resources for amusement. Another child would have wept, perhaps, or screamed, to attract attention ; but he invented games with his bunch of keys, his cart, and ball, and bricks ; he discovered how interesting things are if you look at them enough—patterns on carpets, water-carts filling at the plug, any view from any window, at which he would stare till, as they put it, the

eyes were coming out of his head. From this training came a habit of investigation, so that he could not pass a scene or a picture, as most of us do, lightly and carelessly ; he must always be studying it, brooding over it, and thinking about its plan and purpose ; which, when written, turned out to be the imaginative description we wonder at, the eloquence which we put vaguely down as a gift or a style, the analytic mind of Ruskin.'

A little of this spirit on the part of those whose duty it is to care for him in church on the Sabbath would be of immense service to the child to-day. It is wise that the little time he spends there should be made interesting, but it is not wise that he should be coddled into attention. That with the hard seats and long sermons he had dreary experiences in the past may be allowed, without going on to allow that the fuss which is made about his comfort to-day is wholesome and invigorating. It certainly would be well if he were given imperatively to understand that during the sermon his business is not to lounge, or to sleep, or to whine, or to chatter, or to play,

or to scrape his feet, or to indulge in all sorts of mischievous tricks, but to listen.

I shall probably be condemned for saying so, but it seems to me that the five minutes' talk to the children so greatly in favour just now has not so much to be said for it as its advocates imagine. It is another symptom of the feverish desire to gratify rather than to educate the youthful mind—an outcome of the hold-them-by-any-means policy which will probably culminate some day in a symposium arranged by an enterprising editor in which boys and girls will be invited to state what subjects they should be required to study, or in having a column for fathers and mothers in a religious weekly, conducted by some precocious juvenile commissioned to bring up to date the antiquated methods of his parents.

Turning aside for a moment, I should like to interpolate here a conviction of mine that the man in the pew has reason to complain of a tendency in some churches to impart to the worship a snippety, restless character. There is a sort of preacher who delights

in fussing the service. He begins with an exposition of the lessons, in which everything that is obvious is accentuated and everything that is obscure ignored; then comes a much-made-of address to the children, followed by peddling, patronizing comments on the announcements; finishing up—if it be fortunate enough to finish then—with a sermon that makes you understand the hearer who said he had no objection to a man preaching to the children first if he only would not preach to the infants afterwards. The effect is to clothe with pettiness that which ought to be dignified and exalted, that which ought to lift us to levels on which we feel that ‘we escape from the littlenesses which cling to the round of common life, and our minds are tuned in a higher and nobler key.’

This, however, is a digression. Returning to our discussion of the talk to the children, and admitting that it may be an improvement on the neglect of the past, yet would it not be decidedly better if no such distinction were made, and the whole sermon so framed that it should interest both old and young? The

true preacher will aim at this ideal. His sermon will be a tour through a grand country : there will be mountains for the strongest to climb, and hillocks over which little ones may scramble ; rivers in which men can swim, and brooks in which babes may dip their tiny feet. The child of to-day is not lacking in perception, and better than singling him out and fretting or flattering him into attention is it for the preacher to bear him on with the rest along a pleasant and upward way.

Above all must it be borne in mind that it is personality more than precept that affects and lives with the child. What he will remember of the preacher in years to come is not what he said, but what he was. The thing that will abide will be the vision left in his imagination, not the words fixed on his memory, even as George Eliot describes for us so winningly in *Adam Bede*, when she makes Dinah Morris say, in her beautiful sermon : ‘ It was on just such a sort of evening as this, when I was a little girl, and my aunt, as brought me up, took me to hear a good man preach out of doors, just as we are here. I remember

his face well : he was a very old man, and had very long white hair ; his voice was very soft and beautiful, not like any voice I had ever heard before. I was a little girl, and scarcely knew anything, and this old man seemed to me such a different sort of a man from anybody I had ever seen before, that I thought he had perhaps come down from the sky to preach to us, and I said, " Aunt, will he go back to the sky to-night, like the picture in the Bible? " "

It would also be well if, when the service is finished, and the family has reached home, father or mother should recapitulate the chief points of the sermon with the aid of the children. Much better this than the prevailing habit of simply expressing approval or dissatisfaction, and much more likely to fix permanently in the young mind the truth to which it has listened. A practice that used to prevail in many boarding schools was that of encouraging the pupils to commit to writing on the Sunday afternoon as much as they could remember of the sermon to which they had listened in the morning. This, when not made

too burdensome, was a healthy discipline, distinctly superior to those methods of the present which allow young people to listen as little as they please, to criticize as flippantly as they can, and to forget as much as they choose.

GRATITUDE IN THE HEARER

If in thy bosom falls a seed
That may to fair proportions grow,
Shall not the hand that met thy need
The sweetness of its service know?

GRATITUDE IN THE HEARER

HAVE you ever thanked a preacher for the good received from a sermon—not in your heart merely (that you have done a thousand times), but openly, in brave, hearty words?

I ask the question because many good people are heathens in this regard. They cherish a sort of superstitious belief that to thank a preacher will make him vain, and rather than wake the old Adam in him they hush their gratitude into silence.

Be not ye of this mind! If birds of hope have been made to sing where once only frogs of despondency croaked, if light has broken in upon your darkness, if there has been kindled in you a new enthusiasm for goodness, hide not your gains underground, but tell them to the worker of your joy, and let him share your gladness.

Not to express your gratitude is to do your heart and reputation an injustice. It is to place yourself among the nine who were cleansed, and who returned not to give thanks, whereas your proper station is with him who 'turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.' The loud voice may generally be dispensed with, though there are occasions when, not only he who has ministered to you for good should know of your gratitude, but those who stand around.

If hearers knew more of the discouragements of preaching, how sorely tempted ministers often are to think that all their labour is as naught, they would avail themselves much more frequently of the blessed privilege of giving thanks. No true man preaches for the praise he may receive, nor does he abate his zeal when commendation is lacking ; and yet the heart parched with disappointment is often freshened into gladness by a grateful acknowledgement of benefits conferred. Often at the end of a service, when he imagines he has done wretchedly, and would fain rush away and hide himself from sight, he is

strengthened for new endeavour by the kindly expressions of a hearer to whom the word he deemed so fruitless has been made a special blessing.

To express our appreciation of our friends while they live is better than leaving it to be written upon their tombstones. We do not know that the dead ever read their own epitaphs—indeed, we may charitably hope they do not; but we do know that the living can gather much cheer from a word by the way. A wife will make a better dinner for her husband on the Tuesday, if she has been specially commended for the one he enjoyed so much on the Monday. Preachers are made of the same stuff as ourselves; and if the good they accomplish is gratefully acknowledged, they cannot but be stimulated to labour with greater zest.

A minister of my acquaintance had serious misgivings as to whether his words were of much service to a certain member of his congregation. The build and atmosphere of the man's mind were so different from his own that he doubted whether he ever moved

him. The two men were great friends ; but while they conversed freely on other matters, no word escaped either on this subject. Years passed, and the minister had to remove to another field of labour, and then it was as though a window were opened in a dark chamber. The man to whom he feared he had been a stumbling-block rose in a large assembly, and in words charged with intense feeling declared that the minister's teaching had been more to him in the past and would be more to him in the future than any to which he had ever listened. The minister bowed his head in tearful thankfulness to God, and the incident has been as light to him in many dark places since ; and yet one cannot but think, had the gratitude been expressed earlier, the benefit to each might have been greatly enhanced.

Every preacher holds among his most valued treasures the letters received from those to whom his words have brought comfort and light. He turns to them when the field of his toil seems arid and unfruitful, and hears them bid him take heart of hope. As one

who understood the matter from painful experience has said, 'If it were not for such rewards and consolations presenting themselves at times, the Christian ministry would be, at least to some minds, and in the present day, insupportable.' These letters also are the origin of many of the preacher's most precious friendships. They bring him into contact with spirits kindred to his own, with whom afterwards sweet fellowship is enjoyed.

That preachers may be spoiled through being apprised of the good they do is a weak, unworthy notion. The man whom thanks will spoil is one as a rule to whom thanks is seldom due; the man who merits our thanks is one with whom they may be safely trusted. Every preacher worth his salt knows the value of his work, and the weaknesses and imperfections amid which it is performed, and will never feel his spirit harmed by the kindly words that may be spoken concerning it. The true feeling in such a matter was well expressed by that great preacher F. W. Robertson, when a hundred young men of his congregation presented him with an address at the Town

Hall, Brighton, and when, in replying, he said : ' No one can feel more deeply than I do the deficiencies, the faults, the worthlessness, of the ministry of which you have spoken so kindly and so warmly. Whatever eyes have scanned those deficiencies, I will answer for it that none have scanned them so severely as my own. Others may have detected its faults more keenly, no one has felt them as bitterly as I have. And yet, for all this, I shall not for one moment disguise my belief that much of what has been said to-night is true. We have not come here to bandy compliments with one another. You have not come to flatter me ; and I have not come, with any affected coyness, to pretend to disclaim your flattery, in order that it may be repeated. You have told me in the frank spirit of Englishmen that my ministry has done you good. Frankly, as an Englishman, I tell you with all my heart I do believe it. I know that there are men who once wandered in darkness and doubt, and could find no light, who have now found an anchor and a rock and resting-place. I know there are men who were feeling

bitterly and angrily what seemed to them the unfair differences of society, who now regard them in a gentler, more humble, and more tender spirit. I know that there are rich who have been led to feel more generously towards the poor. I know that there are poor who have been taught to feel more truly and more fairly towards the rich. I *believe*—for on such a point *God* can only *know*—that there are men who have been induced to place before themselves a higher standard, and perhaps I may venture to add, have conformed their lives more truly to that standard. I dare not hide my belief in this. I am deeply gratified in being able to say that, if my ministry were to close to-morrow it would not have been, in this town at least, altogether a failure. There is no vanity in saying this. A man must be strangely constituted indeed if he can say such things and not feel deeply humbled in remembering what the instrument is—how weak, how frail, how feeble—by which the work is done.’

When words like these can be employed with accuracy, even though in lesser degree,

to describe the relation subsisting between a preacher and his congregation, the giving of thanks, the one to the other, will be as pleasant and healthful as the light the sun sheds upon the earth and the smile the earth gives back to the sun.

ON HEARING TOO MUCH

Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us
do what we can.

EMERSON.

ON HEARING TOO MUCH

THROUGHOUT this work the sermon has been kept in a high place, and its importance emphasized ; but, after all, it is well not to let it bulk too largely in our church life. It is a most valuable means of religious instruction and stimulation ; but not on this account should the other portions of the service be subordinated to it, as they are, for instance, when the hymns and prayers that precede it are spoken of as ‘the preliminaries.’ A worshipper hears too much, or makes too much of hearing, when, even though he listen devoutly, the sermon becomes the picture in which his soul is absorbed, and all else but the frame that surrounds it.

Preaching is but one of the phases of our worship, one of the forms into which it passes during a service, a part that must not be

allowed to tower above the rest—regarded indeed in many churches and by many people as of secondary importance. It only attains to its true place and significance when it is treated as a passage in the colour and movement of the devotion which makes up the music of our worship. We do not pray and sing in order to preach and hear ; but prayer and song, preaching and hearing, unite to constitute the homage we render to our Maker, and through which there come to our spirits sanctity and illumination.

We hear too much, also, when we encourage the disposition, so widespread at the present, to lay stress on mere talk. That talking is overdone, both in the Church and out of it, is a conviction deepening in many minds. In newspapers and parliaments, conventions and congresses, councils and committees, sacred assemblies and secular gatherings, speech is continually made a substitute for action. Men seem to imagine there is some mystic virtue in drenching themselves and others in showers of words. Everything in heaven and earth is brought under discussion. Nothing is too

trivial, nothing too sacred, to escape the clatter of the tongue. Reticence is out of fashion. Who dwells in the fruitful realm of silence? Who spends forty days or even forty minutes in the wilderness? We are a garrulous generation, running to seed on the stalks of an unbridled verbosity. The closure would be a benefaction in more places than the House of Commons. If the talk would translate itself into action, even more of it might be tolerated ; but the most of it brings no more of Pentecost than a sound 'as of a rushing mighty wind.' Wind and sound seem to satisfy the multitudes who spend so much of their time in creating them.

Whatever results beside may issue from the present struggle in the Far East, one thing for which the Japanese will long be admired is the effectual hush they have laid upon the men who lift up their voices in the public prints, and the magnificent reticence with which they have carried on their work, and thereby rendered it the more terribly effective.

Woe to the land if there are not more silent days in store for ourselves ; if we weary not

of this incontinent chatter ; if there come no times when the sensuous delight of sounding voices will cease to charm—when, wise and silent, we shall see our task and do it—when the second sermon shall be postponed until the first has begun to shape itself in practice !

Does he not also hear too much who allows the pulpit to colour all his thinking, never flashing into it a tint of his own creation ? No preacher is infallible. If you meet with one who is, flee him as you would the plague ; for his teaching will work more harm to the mind than disease can work in the body. Leave to yourselves room to grow, and to grow in your own way. Do not let your opinions be crushed into set shape by some external pressure. If the preacher is worthy, let him direct, but do not let him tyrannize your mind. The pew is not meant to be simply an echo of the pulpit : where it is, the pulpit will soon cease to be a living voice. You only hear aright when you bring to the preacher not only a responsive but in some degree a resistant mind—a mind whose resiliency enables it to rebound at his touch,

a mind that shapes into fashions of its own the thought it receives from him.

It has been wisely said that 'everybody ought to have his own religion. In one sense we are all disciples of Christ, but nevertheless each man has troubles peculiar to himself, and it is absurd to expect that any book system will be sufficient for each one of us at all points. You must make your own religion, and it is only what you make yourself which will be of any use to you. Don't be disturbed if you find it is not of much use to other persons. Stick to it yourself, if it is really your own, a bit of yourself.'

You have been exhorted to render proper deference to the preacher, but such deference must ever be accompanied by respect to yourself; for he who has not learned to respect himself will always fail in due regard for others. Treat with reverence your own personality. Let it not be invaded and overrun by foreign forces. It is worth more to you than all the lands beyond; see that its frontiers are respected, its prerogatives maintained, its resources developed.

Do not live as a mere pensioner on the bounty of the pulpit, having no thoughts, no opinions, no beliefs, save what you receive from the preacher. Such a condition of pauperism, of mental serfdom, is humiliating. Have lands and corn and wine, coin and climate and produce, of your own. Accept gratefully what the preacher has to bestow, but do not let him or books or newspapers be the donors of all your mental stores. Possess something that is of your own creation—some thought or feeling on which you have stamped the imprint of your own being.

Learn the important truth that in the mental and spiritual world nothing is really ours but what our minds have seized, coloured, fashioned, with their own fingers. Neither truth nor virtue can come to us ready made. Information concerning outward things may pass to us almost mechanically from other minds, but thought, feeling, must be impressed with our own image and superscription. 'He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies must carry out the wealth of the Indies.' Truth cannot be received at second hand.

‘ Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul. What he announces, I must find true in me, or reject; and on his word, or as his second, be he who he may, I can accept nothing.’

All the great fountains of inspiration open to the preacher are available also for him who listens. God, Nature, the Bible, Humanity, Art, Science, Literature, are as accessible to him who hears as to him who speaks. Into these wells you may dip your own vessel, and bring up your own draught of living water. For you the sun shines and the waters flow, the sea uplifts its voice and the winds rush round the world; for you spring and summer, autumn and winter, tell their rapturous stories to the earth; for you the Bible gives forth its wondrous unfolding of the sin of man and the love of God, the wandering into the far country and the glorious welcome home. Into that land of Holy Writ, among its fields and lanes, its woods and hills, you may ramble unrestrained, and the treasures you gather will have a worth and beauty due to the selection

and arrangement of your own fingers; and open to you also is that new Scripture which God is writing in the history of men and nations day by day. The more you read and understand of these two Bibles for yourself, the better will be your-understanding of those who teach you from their pages. Your own meditation will make clearer the thoughts imparted to you by others, and the light and calm that fall on you through prayer when alone will give added force to the words you hear from the preacher in the house of God.

And now my homilies on hearing draw to a close, nor can they end on a better note than this of mental independence and responsiveness : that the man in the pew shall, by the grace of God, make for himself a large, deep nature, ripe to give and quick to receive, even as the brimming lake gladdens the earth while it mirrors the moods of the sky.

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